

DIGNITY IN PRACTICE:

**OUR SHARED PURPOSE
TO PROVIDE SAFE AND
COMPASSIONATE CARE
OF OLDER PEOPLE**

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- Led by Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, in partnership with Age UK North Tyneside.
 - Tested across three orthopaedic wards and five medical wards caring for older people.

INTRODUCTION

People aged over 65 account for 70% of hospital bed days, and one in three admitted to hospital will experience memory problems as a result of depression, delirium or dementia.

A team at Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust has developed a programme that aimed to bridge the gap between the principles and

rights outlined in the NHS Constitution, and the reality of care experienced by older people.

The programme involved aligning the work of the trust's corporate services in human resources and patient experience, with the work of the clinical teams in order to provide dignified and compassionate care for older people.

WHY DID THEY DO THIS PROJECT?

Caring for older people is a major part of the work of the NHS. The number of hospital admissions is rising faster among older people than for any other age group, with recent Department of Health data showing a 37% increase in emergency admissions among people aged over 80 in the last two years.

Numerous reports have exposed shortcomings in the care of older people. In Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, an internal audit had highlighted that only 10% of newly qualified doctors felt confident about meeting the needs of people with dementia and delirium.

This Shared Purpose project looked to understand more about the barriers to dignified care for older people, and the learning needs of the trust's staff. They prioritised and promoted local education initiatives to ensure the workforce, environments and clinical care were fit for purpose.

They recognised that every member of the organisation has a part to play in delivering excellence in care for older people, and the scope was ambitious around supporting and developing the whole workforce to improve the care experience for older people using their services.

WHAT DID THEY DO?

The team at Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust brought together the work of the clinical and corporate teams to transform the patient pathway and ensure that the way care is delivered is as important as the care itself.

To promote and enable dignity and compassion in practice, a number of interventions were devised by the project team around three key areas:

- the climate of care
- supporting and developing the workforce
- improving the care experience for patients.

Following extensive stakeholder research, carefully chosen interventions were implemented and tested.

To improve the experience for older people, three nutrition assistants were recruited to promote more choice, extra snacks and sociable eating. Age UK were welcomed to observe care and feed back to staff on person-centred behaviours, and information resources and a telephone helpline were also introduced.

Peer support and resilience training were provided to ward managers and a framework for values-based recruitment introduced. Over 500 managers have been trained in values-based recruitment, and over 2,000 members of staff selected in this way. Training was also provided to 20 multidisciplinary teams on 'learning about the person'. The trust's induction programme was changed to provide an upfront message on dignity.

Tracking of patient experience by consultant was introduced, with top performers published and results discussed in appraisals. Ward objectives were set by the team. These were agreed by the board and implemented, and ward-level safety data was fed back on a weekly basis.

WHAT IMPACT DID THEY SEE?

The impact of the programme has been felt in a number of ways. Within a highly complex programme, the gains achieved within each strand of the programme have aggregated to contribute to a 'greater than the sum of the parts' story of organisational change.

Encouraging kindness and compassion and regularly providing teams with feedback on how they are doing has encouraged novel ideas on how to improve care; from the nursing assistant who hand-knitted a poppy for each patient on Remembrance Day, to the ward team that has successfully reduced falls in older people.

Promoting sociable eating and wellbeing with the recruitment of nutrition assistants has increased the likelihood of patients gaining weight in hospital. There has also been a statistically significant reduction in length of stay – on average 8.8 days per patient – with a potential associated cost saving of just under £800,000 for one ward in one financial year.

Evidence of change can also be seen from the results of the trust's staff survey, particularly in the proportion of staff who feel that high-quality patient care is the number one priority of the trust. This has risen from 43% in 2007 to 84% in 2014.

There have been year-on-year improvements in real-time measurement scores, with patients giving an average score of 98.5% for being treated with kindness and compassion.

There has been a sharp rise since the programme was implemented in patients reporting always being treated with dignity and respect at the trust – from 82% to 90.5%.

WHAT DID THEY LEARN?

New relationships

The new relationship with Age UK brought important learning as both organisations had to understand more about how each other operated. Despite initial organisational challenges, the partnership proved successful on the wards and staff hugely appreciated the honest feedback from an external source. Their constructive feedback has provided staff with an opportunity to celebrate and improve.

Importance of upfront messaging to staff

The team learnt how important it is that corporate teams feel connected to the frontline and understand how their role contributes to delivering excellent, dignified care.

By redesigning the trust's induction process, an upfront message has been delivered to staff when they enter the organisation that the trust puts patients first and values all staff, recognising that everyone's contribution counts.

Communication is key

Ward-based communications proved to be crucial to the programme. This was challenging at times, as frontline staff are extremely busy. So the team worked to make it as easy as possible for clinical staff to feel engaged with the programme, and they aligned their shared purpose objectives to the business unit priorities to avoid what seemed like an additional workload.

Regular face-to-face communication on the wards proved crucial in maintaining relationships with clinical staff, and progress was fed back to the ward teams on a regular basis.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD THEY GIVE TO OTHERS?

Ensure senior support

An improvement programme of this scale is unlikely to succeed or be sustained without strong support from the executive management team. This programme was helped in this by becoming one of only five 'whole organisation' priorities.

Less can be more

The team were overly ambitious at the start and it took them a while to make sense of the complexity of the intervention. Concentrate on fewer things in order to keep focused and enable flexibility. Find your 'golden thread' (in this programme it was 'dignity') and hold on to it.

Invest in the project team

Invest time at the start in finding the right people, and don't underestimate the need for excellent project management skills and admin support.

Get the balance right between push and pull

Be sensitive to the needs of the wider organisation and the pressure on staff who face multiple and often competing priorities – know when to step back and when to be flexible.

Measure well, measure the right things, measure often and share quickly

Staff are hungry for information on how they are doing.

Visualise the project

Use visual ways of presenting information. Clear infographics can be an incredibly powerful way of not only simplifying and sharing the narrative, but of helping maintain focus as a programme team.